5. Time For Action

Proceeds of Privilege

The 1908 budget, which included the proposal to introduce old age pensions from 1 January 1909, was presented by Asquith to the House of Commons. Lunatics, vagrants and criminals were to be excluded from payment of a pension of five shillings (seven and six for a married couple), as were those with an income of more than ten shillings a week. Payment was to be from the age of 70. Whilst appearing generous, average life expectancy was 47 for men and 50 for women. Even then an annual pension bill of £5 million had to be found. Double this was required to fund expansion of the naval fleet to keep ahead of Germany.

The Conservatives were intent on bringing down the government after being slaughtered at the polls in 1906. The real battleground for the 'People's Budget' of 1909 was in the House of Lords that had to approve it. Income tax was to be increased by two pence in the pound from one shilling on unearned income and incomes of more than £3,000 a year, a rise over 16%. A 'supertax' of sixpence in the pound was to be levied on £3,000 increments above £50,000. Petrol was to be taxed at thee pence per gallon, motor car ownership taxed also and excise duties on tobacco, spirits, stamp duty and estate duty raised.

Most controversial of all was a package of land taxes. A tax of 20% was to be levied on the increase on land value when land changed hands by sale, gift or inheritance, and capital tax of one halfpenny in the pound on all undeveloped land and mineral values. There was also a 10% 'reversion duty' on money owed to a lessee at the end of a lease.

Although modified at the Committee stage, the Bill didn't placate landowners, many of whom had gained in the Agricultural Land Bill of 1897 which had proposed a 50% reduction in the rating of farmland. Prime Minister Salisbury had benefited to the tune of £2,000 a year, his nephew Arthur Balfour by nearly £1,500 and Duke of Devonshire by a whopping £10,000. The question was how best to squirrel away assets. The Liberal aristocrat Lord Rosebery was quick to denounce the practice with cutting sarcasm. He referred to "ships crossing the Atlantic, carrying stocks and bonds as ballast, in order that they might be got away from the jurisdiction of his Majesty's Government."

Even Rosebery was upstaged by Lloyd George whose witty use of metaphor hardly quelled alarm. "I have no nest-eggs at all. I have got to rob somebody's hen-roost next year. I am on the lookout for which will be the easiest to get, and where I shall be least punished, and where I shall get the most eggs; not only that, but where they can most easily be spared." Lord Ridley, a prominent landowner, believed the House of Lords had a constitutional right to veto the budget. "The Lords had hitherto acquiesced to decisions of the House of Commons because the government had been conducted by sane men, but there was now a House of Commons controlled by madmen." Alarm and panic were understatements.

Whilst Churchill was generally supportive of Liberal policy, Lloyd George was uncertain of his stance on the budget, fearing he was 'Blenheim minded.' Concerns were soon allayed. At Leicester, Churchill lambasted the idle rich. "We do not only ask today how much you have got? We also ask where did you get it? Did you earn it yourself or has it just been left to you by others?" By now Churchill was in full flow. "Was it gained by processes which are themselves beneficial to the community in general, or was it gained by processes which have done no good to anyone, only harm? Was it gained by supplying capital that industry needs or by denying, except at an extraordinary price, the land which industry requires?" He

poured scorn on the wealthy keen to denounce their opponents as Jacobins, anarchists and communists "and all the half-understood vocabulary of irritated ignorance." Hereditary peers had a vested interest. This did not escape the acerbic humour of Liberal MP, Augustine Birrell. "The House of Lords represents nobody, but themselves, and they enjoy the full confidence of their constituents."

Matters came to a head on 30 July 1909 when Chancellor of the Exchequeur, Lloyd George, addressed a meeting of the Budget League in the Edinburgh Castle, a public house turned temperance hall in London's East End. What became known as the Limehouse Speech made conflict inevitable. Referring to building the naval Dreadnought he said, "So we sent the hat round. We sent it amongst workmen. They all dropped in their coppers. We went around Belgravia and there has been such a howl ever since that it has well nigh deafened us."

Incensing Lloyd George was landlords reaping the benefit of huge increases in the price of land in the Thames marshlands, the Duke of Devonshire hiking up property ground rent from a few hundred pounds to several thousands, and the Duke of Northumberland profiting from a school on his land with children destined to work on his estates. Such substantial passive incomes were a prime target. Lloyd George further enraged opponents about the perks of privilege. "Who ordained that the few should have the land of Britain as a perquisite?"

In early October Lloyd George, campaigning in Newcastle, explained how well the economy and industry were doing and the stock market too. "Only one stock has gone down badly; there has been a great slump in dukes." To laughter, he quipped, it costs as much to keep two Dreadnoughts as only one duke, who "are just as great a terror and last longer." He ramped up the rhetoric and ridicule. "Most of the people who work hard for a living in the country belong to the Liberal Party. I would say and think, without offence, that most of the people who never worked for a living at all belong to the Tory Party."

Lloyd George reserved his punchline for representation. "The question will be asked whether five hundred men, ordinary men, chosen accidentally from the unemployed, should override the judgement, the deliberate judgement, of millions of people who are engaged in the industry which makes the wealth of this country." A radical, possessing fiery energy, and a man of the people, Lloyd George used invective to great effect and humour also. Speaking to a group of Welsh farmers he declared, "We will have Home Rule for Ireland and for England and for Scotland and for Wales. One farmer, half drunk, chimed in, "and for hell." Lloyd George quickly replied. "Quite right. I like to see a man stand up for his own country."

Avoiding A Proliferation of Peers

For Edward VII, the Limehouse speech produced "a state of great agitation and annoyance" with complaints about the use of "inappropriate language." The King suggested a general election with victory giving a clear mandate, but Asquith preferred a bill containing only the uncontroversial taxes to enable revenues to be collected. Colleagues advised him this could backfire. Ploughing on, the Finance Bill received its third reading on 4 November 1909, and predictably the House of Lords rejected it on 30 November by 350 votes to 75. Every duke voted against. The King was reluctant to create some 300 peers that he felt was tantamount to destruction of the House of Lords. He felt the Government should go to the country.

There was little choice but to hold a general election in January 1910 with an unpredictable outcome in prospect. Rarely are elections fought on issues selected by a government. The Conservative Unionists gained 116 seats, totalling 273 against the Liberal's 275, but to the

rescue came the Nationalists with 82 and Labour on 40. The price of Nationalist support was abandoning thoughts of Home Rule for Ireland. The crisis would drag on it seemed but the opposition, well aware of an intent to create new peers, decided to let the Budget through in the Lords. They would hold their fire. The Third Reading of the Bill passed the Commons on 27 April and the following day it was passed by the Lords without a division.

The threat of creating new peers was left for another Monarch as on 6th May 1910 Edward VII died at Sandringham, following a heart attack. It was no great surprise given the girth of the King at 48 inches, consistent with his extravagant lifestyle. His successor, George V, was persuaded with great reluctance to accept new peers, unaware that Balfour was prepared to form a government. A further General Election was held between 3 to 19 December, the last in protracted form. It produced a similar result, so once again stalemate. The stakes were raised as a new Parliament Bill was drafted to curtail the powers of the House of Lords.

The preamble to a new Parliament Bill referred to the Lords being constituted on a popular basis, instead of hereditary, though this would be introduced gradually. The Lords was to be stripped of its power over most money bills and could delay passage for a maximum of two years only, spread over three Parliamentary sessions. Between 28 June and 6 July 1911, the Lords repeatedly returned the Bill to the Commons. Full of angst, the King appealed to the Conservative Unionists to give way. The Parliament Bill was carried in the Lords by 131 votes to 114 on 10 August 1911, thanks to thirteen bishops and to Lord Curzon persuading 37 colleagues to support it.

The Lords continued to retain its Edwardian characteristics ever since Edward VII revived the pageant, pomp and ceremony of the State Opening of Parliament. As Roy Hattersley states, show and cynicism combined to produce a perception of progress that appeared fitting for the Edwardian era. Those more jaundiced today might argue in perpetuity, with currently 690 life peers, 91 hereditary peers and 25 bishops; a total of 806 members in what is still an unelected Second Chamber.

Improving Quality of Life

In 1908 Winston Churchill became President of the Board of Trade, an important post that required an injection of new blood and fresh thinking. "I do not want to see impaired the vigour of competition, but we can do much to mitigate the consequences of failure." He was alluding to the relative decline of manufacturing, the domestic agenda, the rise of the USA and of Germany, protecting its citizens against the economic effects of sickness, disability and old age through personal contributions. William Beveridge, Oxford social scientist and a journalist on the Morning Post, visited Germany. He was impressed with action to redress the adverse impact of unemployment to boost economic activity and provide a safety net for society. Forty years later these were pillars for the foundation of the UK welfare state.

Churchill was convinced by measures to alleviate distress caused by unemployment and need to establish labour exchanges; they were inexorably interwoven. He was blunt in his views to Herbert Asquith, Prime Minister. "Germany, with a harder climate and less accumulated wealth, has managed to establish tolerable conditions for her people. She is organised not for war but peace. We are organised for nothing except politics." Labour exchanges opened on 31 January 1910.

Sweated trades came under scrutiny. Mr Holmes, a police court missionary, revealed two or three widowed home-workers had attempted suicide. One spent forty years assembling

match boxes at her home in Bethnal Green "and her payment for that work is practically the same as it was at the beginning." Four trades were covered by new legislation: tailoring, lace-making, paper-box making and chain-making. This affected 200,000 workers, of whom 75% were women.

Crime was troubling the Liberal administration too, especially the low clear-up rates and the approach to punishment. In 1902 finger-printing was introduced and on Derby Day 52 men, arrested for pick-pocketing, had their prints taken. In September a burglar was convicted on this evidence alone, but the police were slow to take advantage of scientific improvements helpful to investigation. The Police Gazette used woodcuts to provide details of wanted men, long after the introduction of photography. The telegraph, not telephone, was used for fear of eavesdropping and not until 1914 was there central control of convictions and sentencing.

Concerning Churchill too was sentencing policy. He was against imprisonment for most crimes and sought other methods, including 'defaulters,' with gymnastics and dumbbells providing vigorous but not excessive exercise, to "preserve rigorous discipline." He cited a recidivist shepherd, imprisoned for three years with ten years' preventative detention for stealing two shillings from a church offertory box, and a boy of twelve sentenced to a birching and six years in a reformatory for pinching four-pence worth of cod. On his appointment as Home Secretary in 1910, Churchill's insisted, "The first real principle which should guide anyone trying to establish a good system of prisons would be to prevent as many people as possible getting there."

The National Insurance Act 1911 created a contributory state scheme: contributions were to be: 4p per worker, employer 3p and state 2p. "Nine pence for four pence" was the mantra. In return a worker would receive 10/- a week for the first 13 weeks if ill and 5/- for the next 13 weeks with free medical attention too, but not for their families.

By 1913 the 425 labour exchanges, where unemployment benefit was paid, kept those out of work in touch with job vacancies. The Shops Act of 1911 gave workers a half-day holiday each week, in addition to Sunday the normal day of rest, and prescribed a maximum of 60 hours a week.

With these measures the Liberals changed the constitutional history of Britain but the Tories sought to avenge defeat. Others groups in society saw an opportunity to secure their rights for organised labour, votes for women as a springboard for fairness and equality, and Home Rule for Ireland that remained a festering issue. Defeat of the House of Lords ended the old order as a result of political campaigning. The Liberals would soon feel a literal blast of more vocal and violent methods as each group sought to achieve their aims. Legacies of decades were catching up with the Liberals by groups venting fury that barely any progress had been made in resolving endemic issues in society. More extreme actions were now called for.

First Steps to Equality

Equality of university education took a few tentative steps in late Victorian Britain with the opening of Girton College, Cambridge, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, London University and Victoria University, Manchester, amongst others. Examinations were taken but full degrees were not awarded by Oxbridge. It still remained a male bastion and this exclusivity applied to the professions also. In 1901 there were 172,000 women teachers and 72,000 nurses but only six architects, three veterinary surgeons and two accountants. There were no solicitors or barristers. Only men could practise law. Whist causing simmering resentment, the denial

of voting rights was to be incendiary. The ballot box was the catalyst to break through a male dominated society with entrenched attitudes and narrow views on the role of women.

Attempts at voting reform following the 1867 Act were led by John Stuart Mill, John Bright, Charles Kingsley, the Christian Socialist Frederick Denison Maurice and Millicent Fawcett. Opposing them was a Victorian mindset of domesticity, marital disharmony, prescribed and expected roles, distractions of pregnancy and a male preserve of matters of state such as finance, law, defence, foreign affairs and British imperial interests. It was also claimed that, in temperament and education, women were not equipped to vote in an intelligent way.

The 1884 Reform Act was another chance missed. In 1897, 1904 and 1908 three women's suffrage bills were considered but Parliamentary time was not made available. Whilst some saw this as progress, it only increased irritation as over one million women voted in local government elections. From a political standpoint there were other considerations, not least the way women would vote, and that 40% of males still did not have the vote. Opponents pointed to large organisations such as the Mothers' Union not supporting female suffrage. Change, if it came, was likely to be incremental and slow. The more vocal felt the moderate National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, formed in 1897, lacked drive and energy in relying on pamphlets, posters and marches rather than more vigorous and direct methods.

Impossible To Ignore

In Manchester, Esther Roper and Eva Gore-Booth campaigned for better working conditions in the cotton industry for the 96,000 women in the region, with equal pay for identical jobs a major issue. They were soon joined by energetic campaigner Emmeline Pankhurst, active in politics and member of the Board of Guardians for the Chorlton workhouse.

In 1898 after the death of Richard, her barrister husband, Emmeline and her family moved to a less expensive Manchester suburb. Emmeline worked as a registrar but was amazed at not being permitted to record marriages. The law stipulated this had to be done by a 'male person.' She was also outraged at the actions of the Independent Labour Party. Her late husband founded a memorial hall in his name for use as the local headquarters for the ILP, but women were excluded.

Of Emmeline's three daughters, Christabel seemed to lack ambition, Sylvia, a talented artist, was destined for Manchester School of Art and Adela to a "dirty board school." Son Harry was a chronic invalid and also suffered from poor eyesight. Suffrage was the catalyst "to improve the economic and social condition of women" but it required impetus and action. The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was formed on 10 October 1903.

Peaceful campaigning changed in 1905 when another private member's bill was talked out in Parliament. Keir Hardie led a protest. This sparked Christabel into action on 13 October 1905 at Manchester's Free Trade Hall where a public meeting was held. She and Annie Kenney, an Oldham factory worker, interjected with a question. 'If returned to power, would the Liberals give women the vote?' Faced with silence, they began to chant and Christabel struck out and spat at a police constable. Rather than pay a fine they opted for prison with three days for Annie and a week for Emmeline.

The word suffragette, used as an expression of abuse by the Daily Mail, was taken up by the Daily Mirror to convey young and irrepressible young women. On 19 May 1906 a rally of 7,000 supporters was held in Trafalgar Square, followed on 23 October by 200 suffragettes storming the central lobby of Parliament. The Times described this incident as "something in

the nature of a tumult." Ten women were arrested and jailed for two months after refusing to keep the peace. Whilst in Holloway all wore prison clothes that caused uproar as the women were treated as third-class offenders. Two were released on health grounds and the others halfway through their sentences.

Doubting support from the Independent Labour Party, moves were made to separate from the ILP in 1906. Christabel was now the chief strategist. She sought wider appeal across the political spectrum. She thought that reform would eventually come from a Conservative and not Liberal or Labour government. By widening its approach, the WSPU felt they could attract more middle and upper class support to donate to its fighting fund. The policy was divisive. A group, led by Teresa Billington-Greig, drafted a new constitution for consideration at the WSPU 1907 annual conference. She wished to see elected delegates steer policy. Insisting on almost military discipline, Emmeline cancelled the meeting and rejected the constitution. A fifth of members resigned to form the Women's Freedom League that in due course had sixty branches and 4,000 members.

The WSPU, now based in London, held a march from Hyde Park to the Strand on 9 February 1907, two days before the State opening of Parliament. Four days later, they marched the short distance from Caxton Hall to Parliament, protesting against the omission of a suffrage bill from proposed legislation. A pitched battle ensued with 34 arrests. All were given bail. Undaunted, the suffragettes regrouped for another attempt but the police were waiting and, by 10:00 pm, 52 protesters had been arrested. The articulate and wealthy were given first division status whilst those of lower social orders were consigned to the second division. On 22 March another march on Parliament ended in violence. This time police horses remained in their stables as the authorities feared protestors might be trampled or kicked to death.

Caxton Hall was the venue for a three days 'Women's Parliament.' On 13 February 1908, the last day, Emmeline was arrested for obstruction for allegedly smacking a police officer in the face with her petition outside the Commons. A surety of £20 to keep the peace was rejected which meant six weeks in prison, in the second division. On 13 June, in a show of strength, 13,000 suffragettes marched from the Embankment to the Albert Hall. Just over a week later on 21 June, thirty special trains brought women from all over Britain to London. The seven processions converged on Hyde Park. Supported by the committed and curious, the crowd swelled to over half a million.

Protesters were in good spirits as attendees Thomas Hardy, H .G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw testified. At 5:00 pm the cry went up from all twenty platforms for the vote without delay. Cheering reached a crescendo with Votes for Women thrice repeated. The previous day Madame Tussauds unveiled waxwork figures of Emmeline and Christabel as well as other prominent suffragettes. After Prime Minister Asquith refused to meet WSPU leaders on 30 June, stones were thrown through the windows of number 10. "It will be bombs next time" said militant Mrs Mary Leigh, as she and Edith New were led away to begin a two months jail sentence in the first division.

The Price of Protest

In 1907 the Liberal Government passed the Qualification of Women Act, enabling women to become councillors, aldermen and mayors of boroughs and chairmen of county councils but not justices of the peace. In its original form the bill excluded married women. Some 2,000 women already served on various urban, parish and rural councils and boards of guardians but MPs struggled to think of any serving as mayor or chairman. Metropolitan boroughs and

county councils were far larger and, in the case of the latter, the preserve of a male landed gentry. Any possible linkage to Parliamentary suffrage for women was firmly rejected.

The Women's National Anti-Suffrage League, founded in 1908, felt weighty political matters and the economic lifeblood of science, industry and commerce were purely matters for men, echoing some of the Parliamentary debates. The League was unimpressed by an activist and militant movement with their liberal attitudes and new-fangled women's rights. Even the Labour conference of 1907 rejected a motion for female suffrage by three to one. Not mentioned was New Zealand being the first to give women the vote in 1893, followed by parts of Australia the next year. The WSPU knew but Britain stood firm in opposing reform.

A pamphlet, "Help the Suffragettes to rush the House of Commons" was an open invitation for 6,000 WSPU protestors to gather in Trafalgar Square on 13 October 1908. Emmeline, Christabel and Flora Drummond, known as 'the General', were charged the next day with incitement to disorder and held at Bow Street. Dinner was sent from the Savoy by Colonel James Murray, a sympathetic Liberal MP.

In the delayed trial, Christabel, who had read law at Manchester University, cross-examined Lloyd George who was not drawn by her definition of 'rush' as merely being in a hurry. She was jailed for three months and Christabel for 10 weeks. Sentences were served as common criminals, with the first part being in solitary confinement. On 28 October 1908 the National Anti-Suffrage League convened their own calm meeting in the WSPU citadel of Caxton Hall. Those present included prominent men and the wives of peers. Lady Jersey presided. By now the League had 95 branches and 9,000 members.

In 1909 events took a dramatic turn. On 17 September two protestors climbed onto the roof of Bingley Hall, Birmingham and pelted Asquith with slates and tiles at a public meeting. In Winson Green prison both refused food. Mary Leigh, who had been involved in previous incidents, was force-fed after four days by two doctors, assisted by eight wardresses, unlike in Scotland which dealt with hunger strikes differently. As well as being immensely painful and unpleasant for the victim, force-feeding was a public relations disaster. The Times reported those force-fed had become extremely violent, breaking cell windows and smashing up furniture. Several were handcuffed and kept in solitary confinement.

During the general election in early 1910, Lady Constance Lytton, the daughter of a former Viceroy of India, addressed a meeting outside Walton prison in Liverpool. Sentenced to a fortnight of hard labour she immediately went on hunger strike. Her account of being force-fed makes grim reading. "He said if I resisted too much with my teeth, he would have to feed me through my nose. The pain of it was intense and at last I must have given way. Then he put down my throat a tube which seemed to me much too wide and something like four feet in length. I choked the moment it touched my throat until it had gone down."

"Then the food was poured in quickly; it made me sick a few seconds after it was down and the action of the sickness made my body and legs double-up, but the wardresses pressed my head back and the doctor leant on my knees. The horror of it was more than I can describe. I was sick over the doctor and the wardresses and it seemed a long time before they took the tube out." Defiant to the end there was no surrender. Force-feeding was stopped after a few days and Lady Constance Lytton was released. Nine months later in September, aged 41, she suffered a heart attack and was afflicted by a series of strokes that paralysed her right side. Her early death at the age of 54 was attributed to her ordeal in Walton Jail.

Going On The Rampage

Following the January 1910 general election, a private member's bill intended that all women householders, except those married, were to be given the vote. At least it was a step in the right direction but, on Black Friday, 18 November the bill failed. A fresh general election was to be called which meant the dissolution of Parliament. Reaction was swift and violent. Four days later Downing Street was the target with 156 arrests including Mary Jane Clarke, sister of Emmeline. Badly injured, Mary Jane then suffered the torment of force-feeding in Holloway. She died of heart failure on release.

By now suffragettes picketed Parliament night and day, to the alarm of the Police who were informed that women were practising shooting in Tottenham Court Road. Panic set in with the prospect of the Prime Minister being shot on entering the House of Commons. Rocks, bricks and stones thrown through windows started in earnest on 22 November 1911 with government departments prime targets as well as Banqueting House and the National Liberal Club. Lloyd-George contended such actions would be counter-productive.

On 1 March 1912 suffragettes went on the rampage in Regent Street, Bond Street, Oxford Street, Piccadilly, and in the Strand. Two days later it was to be the turn of Knightsbridge and Kensington. Emmeline and two colleagues received a sentence of nine months in the second division. They insisted on being treated as political prisoners as otherwise a hunger strike would begin. The authorities agreed but excluded their companions in other jails, whereupon a mass hunger strike began on 19 June.

Three days later force feeding started. Emmeline was released two days later for medical reasons and her two jailed colleagues after five weeks. By now the government realised that the 'notorious agitator' as The Times put it would utilise adverse publicity to maximum advantage. Disguised as a nurse, Christabel disappeared to Paris, staying there until 1914. By this time Sylvia was active too, giving rise to the claim the movement was nothing short of a Pankhurst fiefdom.

In April 1913 the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge) Bill was introduced which allowed women so released to be re-arrested if they misbehaved. It soon became the Cat and Mouse Act. Emmeline was a beneficiary and served six short spells in prison in that year. The great fear of the government was martyrdom. Emily Wilding Davison made the supreme sacrifice on 4 June at Epsom in the Derby, throwing herself under Anmer, the King's Horse, at is rounded Tattenham Corner. She died four days later. The return portion of her rail ticket was found amongst her possessions. The coroner's verdict was misadventure. A WSPU official said she feared nothing, adding her permanent address was Holloway prison where she endured the agonies of force-feeding. Her simple aim was "men and women, hand in hand, not bound but free; both necessary, both of equal value, both the ultimate source of life and power."

After another franchise bill was abandoned in 1913, acts of vandalism, violence and arson were stepped up. Lighted objects were dropped into pillar boxes, Midlands golf courses had 'Votes for Women' etched into the billiard table greens in acid, the windows of the Reform Club were shattered, the orchid house at Kew Gardens trashed, rail stations at Saunderton and Croxley Green, nearly destroyed, churches at Hatcham and Wargrave burnt down and crude home-made explosive devices used against commercial premises.

On 10 March 1914 The Rokeby Venus by Velazquez in the National Gallery was the target for suffragette Mary Davidson, in reprisal for the continued arrest of Emmeline Pankhurst. It was not the £45,000 value of the painting that prompted five slashes with a meat cleaver

but "the way men visitors gawped at it all day long." This was not the only reason. In a WSPU leaflet she wrote, "I have tried to destroy the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest against the Government destroying Mrs Pankhurst, the most beautiful character in modern history."

The Great War Intervenes

The 1911 census showed that almost 40% of women were employed in domestic service and nearly 33% in textiles and clothing. Of all women between the ages of 15 and 25, over 60% were in work. The female workforce exceeded 4.6 million. Even the most myopic couldn't fail to grasp the contribution of women to the British economy and quality of life but political resistance continued to extending the vote. Conservatives were on the whole against with the Liberals divided. The Labour Party view was voting rights should be extended when all men were enfranchised. The Great War had a significant impact in changing attitudes as women made an immense contribution as nurses, working in munitions factories as well as in other vital roles such as driving ambulances and military vehicles. Add to this the harsh conditions men endured in the trenches, placing more pressure to enfranchise all males.

The continuing violence up to the outbreak of War further emboldened anti-suffragettes. In a letter to The Times, Sir Almroth Wright, a leading immunologist and bacteriologist, made extravagant claims about how ill-equipped women were, not only to vote, but in enjoying an equal footing with men. Bigotry and misogyny knew no bounds but rebuttal from physician, Sir Victor Horsley, was swift. "The world is an institution in which women are human beings as much as men are, in which they have precisely the same right to work for their living and precisely the same claim to be justly paid for what they do."

A different reposte to Wright was from "CSC – One of the Doomed." She thought a better question than votes for women was, "ought women not to be abolished altogether?" The author hoped Wright might deliver "mankind from the parasitic, demented and immoral species which has infested the world for so long." The initials CSC were those of Clementine Spencer Churchill, the 26 year old wife of the First Lord of the Admiralty.

In December 1916 Asquith was replaced by Lloyd George who was broadly supportive. A few months later in March 1917 he received a deputation from several suffrage societies, both militant and constitutional. There was a realisation now that full enfranchisement was unlikely and they would have to accept a more limited option. Millicent Fawcett responded, "We should greatly prefer an imperfect scheme that can pass, to the most perfect scheme in the world that could not pass." It was a pragmatic and prescient observation.